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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

18 March 1986

North Korea-USSR: Implications of NPT Accession

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Summary

North Korea's recent accession to the Nonproliferation Treaty and its growing nuclear cooperation with the Soviet Union will place controls on a suspect nuclear program but will not eliminate some longer term risk of nuclear weapons development on the Korean Peninsula. We believe P'yongyang has decided Soviet help is essential to developing a nuclear power program, while Moscow views the cooperation as a means of increasing influence in North Korea at the expense of the Chinese.

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IAEA inspections and safeguards should result in better information about North Korea's nuclear effort, and we believe the Soviets will impose controls on any assistance they provide the North Koreans. But together these safeguards and controls

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[redacted]

could not head off a potential effort by the North to develop a nuclear weapon. Rather than calm leaders in Seoul, the North's closer ties to the Soviets as demonstrated by the nuclear deal and accompanying technology will prompt the South to work harder at keeping its own nuclear options open. [redacted]

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Moscow Welcomes North Korean Accession

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[redacted] North Korea had provided Moscow--as a depositary of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)--its instrument of accession on 12 December. The Soviets took credit for bringing North Korea into the international nonproliferation regime and pressed Washington to make similar progress with Israel, South Africa, and Pakistan. We expect Moscow to continue to contrast its own success and North Korea's demonstration of maturity with alleged noncooperation of US allies. [redacted]

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Soviet propaganda gains, however, are likely to be limited by North Korea's failure to acknowledge publicly its decision to join the NPT. P'yongyang almost certainly was reluctant to accept international controls that mark a departure from self-reliance, the core of North Korean ideology. In addition, North Korean accession to a regime in which South Korea is a member also weakens P'yongyang's claim to be the sole legitimate government on the Peninsula. The Koreans do not belong to many of the same major international organizations; North Korea, for instance, steadfastly rejects South Korea's proposal that both Koreas be admitted simultaneously to the United Nations. [redacted]

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P'yongyang's Objectives and Soviet-North Korean Relations

Accession to the NPT was no doubt a condition for Soviet help to North Korea's nuclear program and conceivably a condition for increases in conventional military and economic assistance. We believe P'yongyang has decided Soviet help is essential if the North is to develop sufficient nuclear power to help relieve chronic energy shortages. The joint communique following Premier Kang Song-san's visit to Moscow on 24-28 December--shortly after P'yongyang acceded to the NPT--included Moscow's agreement to help North Korea construct a nuclear power plant. Discussions on the reactor deal and NPT accession may have been under way since May 1984, when Kim Il-song visited Moscow. The deal probably involves one or more 440-megawatt electric pressurized water reactors of the type the USSR is constructing in Cuba. [redacted]

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North Korea's increasing need for Soviet help with its energy problems, in our judgment, is one factor behind P'yongyang's movement toward Moscow and away from Beijing. Clearly, North Korea's realignment is unlikely to bring an end to its basic independence from both Moscow and Beijing, resolve all differences between Moscow and P'yongyang, or sacrifice its freedom in dealing with Peninsular issues. Nevertheless, North Korea has agreed to join an international regime it has long distrusted and is adhering more closely to the Soviet line on international security issues in exchange for military and economic aid. [redacted]

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Now that it has joined the NPT, P'yongyang may also be encouraging Moscow to step up criticism of the US nuclear presence in South Korea. Public commentaries by both countries after last November's Reagan-Gorbachev summit claimed that the density of nuclear weapons in South Korea was "four times greater" than in NATO and--therefore--that Korea was the most likely starting point for a global nuclear war. The Soviets, in addition, warned that US nuclear weapons in South Korea pose a "threat" to the USSR as well as to North Korea. [redacted]

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NPT adherence may also be part of P'yongyang's effort to project a more responsible international image. North Korea currently is involved in a broad diplomatic dialogue with South Korea, largely, we believe, because it hopes to engage the United States in direct talks leading to the withdrawal of US troops from the Peninsula. [redacted]

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NPT Adherence: A Positive Sign?

The NPT has limitations, and subscription to it does not provide iron-clad assurance that North Korea or another member could not potentially develop a weapon if it chose to do so. Nevertheless, accession to the NPT is generally seen as a major indicator of the peaceful intent of a country's nuclear program. (See Appendix A for a summary of the current North Korean nuclear program.) Furthermore, the attendant International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards on nuclear material help to deter the diversion of nuclear material because of the risk of early detection. The increased openness of the nuclear program that will result from the application of safeguards in North Korea should improve our estimates of the North's capabilities. [redacted]

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Moreover, Soviet involvement could place further controls on the North's nuclear program--and Soviet controls may be more effective constraints on a potential North Korean weapons program than the fact of NPT adherence itself. We expect the USSR to follow its usual pattern of supplying the fuel for reactors it exports and taking back the spent fuel for permanent disposal. In addition, the Soviet Union is a strong supporter of the NPT.

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It adheres rigorously to supplier guidelines and usually controls the use of reactors and research facilities it exports. We doubt Moscow would agree to the transfer of major fuel cycle technology--particularly sensitive technology--and think it unlikely that P'yongyang will test Moscow's resolve in this area. [redacted]

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On the other hand, because nuclear cooperation is encouraged between member states, North Korea's accession to the NPT will make it easier for P'yongyang to seek assistance from brokers or suppliers outside the Soviet sphere. Such assistance could help resolve any difficulties in operation of a new reactor under construction at Yongbyon. The degree to which North Korea looks beyond Moscow will be a strong indicator of its desire to maintain independence in its nuclear program and avoid overwhelming restrictions. To be sure, in view of P'yongyang's political unpredicatability, suppliers could treat North Korea as they do Libya and Iran (both NPT members) and refuse cooperation. But that would reinforce other Third World countries' perceptions that the NPT discriminates against them. [redacted]

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The NPT has other inherent weaknesses. Member states can withdraw, for example, after acquiring needed technology, with only three months' notice. Although the safeguards required of nonweapon states under the NPT are comprehensive, the IAEA--which applies the safeguards--relies on each nation to identify facilities that should be inspected. There are no provisions for the IAEA or any other body to demand the right to inspect a suspect undeclared facility. P'yongyang has not yet negotiated a safeguards agreement with the IAEA, and the closed nature of North Korea will make it difficult to identify with certainty all relevant facilities and ensure that they are declared to the IAEA. The North Korean military will almost certainly object to disclosure of any projects in which it might be involved, even peripherally. Furthermore, we expect P'yongyang to preclude access to its facilities by IAEA inspectors from the United States and perhaps other Western countries, a right it would have under standard IAEA inspection procedures. These factors will make it difficult to gauge North Korean intent. [redacted]

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IAEA safeguards are designed to deter diversion of nuclear material to weapons use, not to prevent it, and would not prove an insurmountable barrier to a determined diversion effort. Finally, the treaty contains no explicit provision for sanctions should a state violate safeguards or other treaty obligations or withdraw from the NPT. [redacted]

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South Korean Equities

Seoul has been caught off balance by North Korea's accession to the NPT and, while initially welcoming the news, is also

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expressing "deep concern" that Moscow is extending help to the North's nuclear program. We believe the South fears that North Korea is managing both to secure sophisticated technology from the Soviet Union and to improve its chances for direct bilateral contacts with the United States by satisfying Washington's long-stated desire for its NPT adherence. [redacted]

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Appendix A: Current North Korean Nuclear Program

The current North Korean nuclear program is based at Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center. A Soviet supplied 4-megawatt IRT research reactor fueled with 80 percent enriched uranium is located there, as well as an indigenous reactor under construction. The indigenous reactor is to be graphite moderated, natural uranium fueled, and gas cooled with a potential power of 30 megawatts. It is based on 1950s technology and bears a marked similarity to the British Calder Hall reactor. We estimate that the reactor will reach full operation in spring 1987. [REDACTED]

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North Korea has a limited domestic supply of uranium. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the North Koreans were reportedly having considerable difficulty with uranium processing and purification [REDACTED]

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Still, in attempting to construct the Yongbyon reactor indigenously, North Korea has developed considerable domestic capability to supplement whatever assistance the USSR gives. [REDACTED]

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We do not know what P'yongyang's purpose was in constructing the Yongbyon reactor--whether strictly for research, as a power reactor prototype, or to support a weapons program. It will have the capability to produce up to 10 kilograms of plutonium per year, but we have no evidence of the construction of the reprocessing plant needed to recover this plutonium or of other activities that should accompany a nuclear weapons program. [REDACTED]

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Appendix B: Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons
Commitments of Parties

- Nuclear weapon states are obliged not to transfer nuclear explosives to any other state, nor assist non-nuclear weapon states in the building or acquisition of nuclear weapons.
- Nonweapon states are obliged not to seek to acquire or manufacture nuclear explosives devices.
- Nonweapon states are obliged to accept IAEA safeguards to verify that no "special fissionable material" is diverted from peaceful purposes for weapons production, and all parties must require such safeguards on all nuclear exports to any nonweapon state.
- All NPT parties are called upon to facilitate the fullest possible dissemination of nuclear technology, consistent with the above restrictions.
- Potential benefits derived from "peaceful nuclear explosions" are to be made available to nonweapon states.
- All parties are to seek an end to the nuclear arms race and to pursue disarmament.
- States have the right to agree to nuclear weapons-free zones in their regions.
- Each party shall..."have the right to withdraw from the treaty if it decides that extraordinary events...have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country." A three-month notification and a statement justifying the action are required before withdrawal.

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